



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Partners for Fish and Wildlife

Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is the Partners for Fish and Wildlife program?

The Partners for Fish and Wildlife program is a technical and financial assistance program administered by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. It works in voluntary partnership with private landowners to restore wetlands, streams and river corridors, prairie, grasslands and other important fish and wildlife habitats for federal trust species (migratory birds, threatened and endangered species, anadromous fish, and some marine mammals). The Program provides advice on the design and location of potential restoration projects as well as financial assistance to implement the projects. Program staff also provide technical assistance to the U.S. Department of Agriculture on its conservation programs.

2. What are the goals of the Program?

The goals of the Partners for Fish and Wildlife program are to:

1. Implement pro-active, voluntary, on-the-ground habitat restoration projects that benefit federal trust fish and wildlife species on private and tribal lands.
2. Develop partnerships to implement these habitat restoration projects.
3. Demonstrate applied technology for habitat restoration projects to help the public understand and participate in fish and wildlife resource conservation.

3. Who can become a Partner?

Although our primary partners are private landowners, anyone interested in restoring and protecting wildlife habitat on private or tribal lands can get involved in the Partners for Fish and Wildlife program, including other federal, State and local agencies, private organizations, corporations, and educational institutions.

4. What kind of land is eligible for restoration under the program?

Any type of privately-owned degraded fish or wildlife habitat is potentially eligible for restoration under the Partners for Fish and Wildlife program.

5. How does the Service handle the financial assistance in the program?

In conjunction with its interested partners, the Service provides financial assistance to private landowners for a restoration project. The landowner may perform the restoration and be reimbursed directly for some or all of his or her expenses. Alternatively, the Service may hire a contractor to complete the work, or the Service may complete the work itself.

While not a program requirement, a dollar-for-dollar cost share is sought on a project-by-project basis. Partners for Fish and Wildlife funds are not used to purchase or lease real property interest or to make rental or other incentive payments to landowners.

6. Do I have to allow public access to my land?

No, having a Partners for Fish and Wildlife restoration project on your property does not mean that you have to open your land up to public access. Service employees, however, may occasionally need access to the project to check on its progress.

7. What is a landowner agreement?

Before implementing habitat projects, the Service and the landowner must sign an assistance agreement or similar document that protects the federal investment. The length of the agreement

must be proportional to the technical and financial assistance provided by the Service, but in no case will the duration be less than 10 years. The agreement states that the landowner will not return the project to its former use or damage or destroy the project during the agreement period without reimbursing the Service for the funds spent on the project. Otherwise, the landowner still retains all legal rights to their property.

8. How can I become a partner?

You can become involved by contacting your State Partners for Fish and Wildlife Coordinator. If a project appears feasible, and fits within the program's priorities, the biologist will schedule a visit to your property. Please see our list of Partners Coordinators for the contact in your state.

9. When will the work be done?

The project will be done as soon as possible based on site selection priorities, available funds and site characteristics such as seasonal conditions. Your project may be done that field season, or you may be added to a list of waiting landowners. In some states, the Service has more landowners interested in the program than it has funds to complete the projects and thus there may be a waiting list.

10. Where does the program focus its efforts? What priorities drive the program?

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service focuses projects in ecosystems or watersheds where our efforts will accomplish the greatest benefits for federal trust species. Projects are designed so that they contribute to the objectives set for these areas. Highest priority is given to projects that benefit declining migratory bird and fish species,

species that are endangered, threatened or proposed for listing, and to projects on private lands that satisfy the needs of wildlife populations on National Wildlife Refuges or contribute to the resolution of problems on refuges.

The Service also gives special consideration to projects that:

- 1) are on permanently protected lands;
- 2) are identified as high priority by Service ecosystem teams or State fish and wildlife agencies and other partners;
- 3) reduce habitat fragmentation;
- 4) conserve or restore natural communities which the State Natural Heritage Programs or Heritage Data Base have designated as globally or nationally imperiled; or
- 5) result in self-sustaining systems that are not dependent on artificial structures.

If other considerations are roughly equal, priority is given to projects that:

- 1) have longer duration agreements;
- 2) involve greater non-Service partnerships and/or cost sharing; and
- 3) have the greatest cost-effectiveness.

11. How do I know if my land has suitable areas for habitat restoration?

Almost any land that has been subjected to intensive land use (cropping, haying, grazing, timber harvest, or mining) may have restoration potential. If you are unsure whether your land is restorable, contact your local Partners for Fish and Wildlife Coordinator for more information. He or she will be able to assess your goals, the land's restoration potential, and the best approach to meet your needs.

For freshwater wetland restoration, areas that have been ditched or drained are the most common and easiest sites to restore. Saltmarsh restorations are often done in areas where soil or other fill was placed in the wetland, where the marsh has been isolated from tidal influence, or where the marsh was ditched for mosquito control.

Riparian restoration is usually undertaken when stream and river banks have little or no vegetation and are eroding. Upland restoration (grasslands, prairies, forests and other habitats) are usually completed in places where the land has been disturbed and the native

vegetation removed. A walk around the property with a Service biologist is the best way to find out about the restoration potential of the site.

12. How is the restoration done?

The project will be designed to restore the original look and function of the habitat. Eradicating any invasive species is also a restoration objective. Restoring freshwater wetlands can involve blocking drainage ditches, breaking tile drains, creating depressional areas, and recreating natural drainageways and stream meanders. Small berms or dikes may be constructed to block existing drainage systems, impound water, and create shallow water areas where plants can grow.

Riparian and in-stream restoration often involves removing the cattle from the stream, providing an alternate water source, and allowing nature to take its course. Sometimes native vegetation is planted to speed up the restoration process. In other cases, stream restoration requires innovative bioengineering techniques to re-create the shape and structure of the stream.

Upland restoration to native grass or woodland is usually accomplished through seeding, planting, or manipulation of existing vegetation through revised management practices (burning, cutting, grazing). Habitat restoration for specific fish and wildlife species, such as endangered species, can take many forms depending on the habitat needs of the wildlife. At many sites, several methods of restoration are done together. Native vegetation is always a priority for restoration.

13. What kind of maintenance is required?

Most wetland restorations are designed to require very little or no maintenance. Keeping livestock off dikes and maintaining water control structures are usually all that is required. This minor maintenance is generally the responsibility of the landowner.

Major maintenance requirements, such as repairing dikes or replacing water control structures, are reviewed on a case by case basis. Structural repairs that

are required within the first year or two after construction as a result of improper design or construction techniques will be repaired by the Service. Normal long-term maintenance and repair of these structures is generally the responsibility of the landowner.

14. Will the Service help me build a stock pond on my property?

The Service does not provide funding for stock pond construction under the Partners for Fish and Wildlife program. We can, however, provide technical assistance that can help improve your existing pond for wildlife use. Generally, the primary goal of pond construction, whether by excavation or impoundment, is to maximize the amount of open water while minimizing the growth of cattails and other aquatic plants. These ponds provide limited value for wetland wildlife.

The goal of most wetland restoration projects is to create a diversity of habitat through a mixture of open water, emergent plants, shallow channels, and islands. Deeper water areas are usually a component of these systems, but average water depth for the entire project is less than 18 inches and these wetlands are sometimes only flooded on a seasonal basis. These conditions provide greater value to a diverse group of wildlife from waterfowl and shorebirds to amphibians and invertebrates.



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